

Genesis Chapters 37-40 Torah Reading (Parshat VaYeshev)
English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman
Latest version November 30, 2020

37:1 Now Jacob had settled in the land where his father had stayed, in the land of Canaan.

Joseph and his brothers

2 [Now we will relate] the chronicles of Jacob. [Joseph was age] seventeen years. He was a shepherd [along with his brothers] of the sheep, and he [was a serving lad] of the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, the wives of his father.

[He informed on them:] [Joseph indeed] brought reports of bad things to their father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph [above all his sons], since the son of his old age was he. And he made for him a coat very colorful.

4 [When they realized]—his brothers—[that he it was] who was loved by his father [above all his brothers], they hated him, and were not able to speak to him words of *shalom*.

5 Then dreamed Joseph a dream, [and told it] to his brothers. And thus increased their hatred of him.

6 He said to them, “[You must hear this]—the dream I had, that I just dreamed:

7 [We were standing]—[we were there], binding sheaves in the middle of the field, [when all of a sudden] there rose up my sheaf, [which stood there erect]. It was surrounded by *your* sheaves, [which bowed down] [to *my* sheaf].”

8 They answered him—his brothers, “[Would you be] king, [reigning over us]? Do you intend to dominate us?”

Thus increased once more their hatred of him, [because of his dreams], [and because of his words].

9 And he dreamed once more—he had [another dream], and told it to his brothers. [Here is what he said],

“[Guess what?] I had a dream again. [I saw both] the sun [and the moon], as well as eleven stars, [bowing down] to me.”

10 He told it [to his father] and to his brothers. [He was scolded for it] by his father, who said to him, “[What does it mean?] What sort of dream is this, that you have dreamed?

Shall [we all come]—myself, your mother and your brothers—and bow down to you to the ground?”

11 They envied him—his brothers, [end aliyah] while his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph sold by his brothers

37:12 [Then went off] his brothers [to pasture the flock]—the sheep of their father—in Shechem.

13 And said Israel to Joseph, “[Are not] [your brothers] [tending sheep] in Shēchem? [Go now:] [I would send you] to them.

”And replied Joseph, “I am ready.”

14 [Israel said] [to Joseph], “Go now and see [how are faring] your brothers, [and how fare] the sheep. [Bring to me] a report.
[So he sent him out] from the valley of Hēbron, and he came to Shechem.

15 [There came upon him] a stranger, and there was Joseph wandering in the field.

[He asked of him]—[the stranger asked] of Joseph—“[What are you seeking?]”

16 [And Joseph said], “It is my brothers [for whom] I am looking. [Can you perchance] [tell me] [where it is] [that they are pasturing?]”

17 Replied the man, “[They have moved on] from here. Because [I heard them] say, ‘[Let us go] to Dotan.’”

[And so departed] Joseph [to go after] his brothers, [and he found them] in Dotan.

18 They spotted him from afar, and before [he got close] to them they plotted against him to kill him.

19 They said, [each one] to the other, “[Look over there]—[the master of dreams]—the dreamer himself is coming.

20 [Now we have the chance!] | [Let’s go] [and kill him], [and throw him] into one of the pits.

[And we will say] that some savage beast devoured him. [Then we will see] what becomes of his dreams!”

21 [When this was heard] by Reuben he said him [from their hand] [by speaking thus:] “Let us not take his life,”

22 and by saying to them—[Reuben pleading]—“[Do not shed blood]. [Throw him] [instead of this]

into the pit over there, there in the wilderness. A hand [do not lay upon him].”

[Reuben said this] [that he might] [rescue him] from their hand, [end aliyah] [and return him] to his father.

23 [And so it was], when Joseph came to his brothers, [they stripped] Joseph of his tunic, the coat that was so colorful, that he had on.

24 [And they took hold of him] and they threw him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was in it no water.

25 [They then sat down] [to eat a meal]. They lifted their eyes and they saw—they beheld a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead.

Their camels [were carrying] spices, balsam and lotus, on their way to bring them down to Egypt.

26 And said Judah to his brothers, “[What profit is there] [if we should] kill our brother [and cover up] his blood?

37:27 [Come, let us go] [and sell him] to the Ishmaelites. [Let our hand] [not be upon him],

since our brother—our flesh—is he.” And they heeded their brother.

28 [Then there passed by] some people who were Midianites—[some merchants]. They pulled [and they lifted up] Joseph from the pit.

[Then they sold] [this man Joseph] to the Ishmaelites [for twenty pieces] of silver. They it were who brought Joseph to Egypt.

29 Then returned Reuben to the pit and saw that there was no Joseph in the pit. And he rent his garments.

30 He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is no more, [and as for me], where can I go?”

31 They took the tunic of Joseph. [They then slaughtered] a young goat and dipped the coat in the blood.

32 [They then sent out] this coat so colorful [and had it brought] to their father. They said, “See what we found.

[Do you recognize] [this coat—the tunic] [belonging to your son]? [Is it his], or not?”

33 He examined it and said, “The coat of my son! A savage beast [must have eaten him]! Torn to pieces was my Joseph!”

34 Then rent Jacob his garments. He wore sackcloth on his hips, and mourned for his son for many days.

35 [And there arose] all his sons and all his daughters [to comfort him], but he refused to be comforted.

[He just said this], “[Now I will go down] [beside my son] in mourning, to the grave.” Thus wept for Joseph—his father.

36 [Thus the Midianites] sold Joseph into Egypt, to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, [end aliyah] commander of the guard.

The story of Judah and Tamar

38:1 It happened at about that time, there went off Judah away from his brothers,

[and he turned] to a man from Adullam, whose name was Chirah.

2 [He saw there]—[Judah saw] a daughter of a Caananite by the name of Shua. He took her and came to her.

3 [She became pregnant] and bore him a son, and gave him the name Er.

4 She became pregnant again [and gave birth] to a son, and named him Onan.

5 Once again she bore a son, and called him by the name Shelah. Judah was in Keziy when she gave birth to him.

6 [Then he took]—[Judah then took] a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar.

7 It happened [that Er], first-born of Judah, was bad in the eyes of YHWH, so he was made to die by YHWH.

8 And said Judah to Onan, “[Come into] the wife of your brother, [in Levirate marriage] (*yibum*) to her, thus preserving seed for your brother.”

38:9 It was known by Onan [that in fact] not in his own name would be the offspring,
 [and so it was] that when he came to the wife of his brother, [he let it go to waste] on the ground so as not to produce offspring for his brother.
 10 [Displeasing it was] in the eyes of YHWH—what he had done, [and God killed him] also.
 11 He spoke—[Judah said this] to Tamar his daughter-in-law, “[You must live] as a widow [in the house of your father]
 [until grown up] is Shelah my son, for he said to himself, ‘He will die too, like his brother’.
 So went off Tamar and lived in the house of her father.
 12 There went by many days when died [the daughter of Shuah], [wife of Judah].
 [After being consoled], Judah [went up] to the shearers of his sheep, [he himself] [along with Chirah] his friend, the Adullamite, to Timna.
 13 They told Tamar, as follows: “Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timna to shear his sheep.”
 14 [So she took off] the clothes of her widowhood [from her body], [covered herself] with a veil [and wrapped herself],
 and sat down by the entrance to Einayim (“The Two Wells”), which is there on the road to Timna.
 Because she saw that grown-up was Shelah, [yet she had not] been given to him as a wife.
 15 When she was seen by Judah, he thought [that she was a harlot], since she had covered her face.
 16 ‘So he turned toward her [on the road] and said, “[Come now I pray], [let me come into] you”,
 [for indeed], he did not know that his daughter-in-law was she. She said, “[What will you give me] for coming in to me?”
 17 [And he replied], “[I will do this:] I will send a kid goat from the flock.
 [To which she said], “[If you give me something as a pledge] until you send it.”
 18 [He then asked], “What is the pledge that [I must give you]?” [She then replied], “Your seal and your cloak,
 and your staff that is in your hand.” [He gave them to her]. He came into her, and she got pregnant by him.
 19 She got up and left, and removed her veil from her face, and put on her clothes of widowhood.
 20 Then sent Judah the kid—[he sent the young goat] by the hand of his friend the Adullamite
 to retrieve the pledge from the hand of the woman, [but the friend could not] find her.
 21 [He then inquired] of the people of her place, asking, “[Where, O where] is the *kadeisha* [sacred prostitute]
 who was at Einayim, (“the wells”) by the road?” And they responded, “There has not been here a *kadeisha*.
 22 [The friend returned] to Judah and said, “I did not find her. Even the people of that place declared, ‘There has not been here a *kadeisha*.’”

38:23 Then said Judah, “[Let her keep them for herself], [lest we] become a laughingstock.

At least I sent this kid here, but you, you could not find her.”

24 [And so it happened], [after [about three months], it was reported to Judah, as follows: “[She committed harlotry]—Tamar your daughter-in-law. [And moreover], she has become pregnant from her looseness.”

[To which Judah] replied, “Bring her out [and have her burned].”

25 As she [was being taken out], she [sent word] to her father-in-law, saying:

“By the man [of whom *these* things] are his, [I have become] pregnant.”

[She said to Judah], “[Examine these]: [To whom belong] [the signet ring], [the wrap of cords], and the staff that are here.”

26 [They were recognized]—by Judah—who said, “[She is righteous] more than me!

[It is because I did not give her] to Shelah my son!” [And never again] [was he intimate with her].

27 [When there arrived] her time to give birth, behold—twins [were in her womb]!

28 While she was birthing, [one twin put out an arm].

It was grasped by the midwife, who tied on the hand [a scarlet thread], [so as to say], “This one came out first.”

29 [But then this occurred]: [the infant [pulled back his hand], and behold! [there came out] his brother, [and she said this]:

“You have asserted yourself [with such pushiness]* (*peretz*), and she** called his name *Peretz* (*breach*). *translation by Aryeh Kaplan **Robert Alter

30 After this, [there came out] his brother, the one on whose hand [was the scarlet thread], [end aliyah] and she called his name *Zerach* (“shining”).

Joseph’s early days in Egypt

39:1 Now Joseph [was brought down] to Egypt, [and he was purchased] by Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, a prominent Egyptian, from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him [down there].

2 But YHWH was with Joseph, and he became a man of attainment [while dwelling in] the house of his lord, the Egyptian.

3 It was seen by his lord that YHWH [was with him], and whatever he undertook, YHWH made to prosper in his hand.

4 [He found favor]—Joseph [gained respect] in his eyes. [Joseph waited] [upon him].

[He appointed Joseph] [to oversee his house], and all that was his, he placed in his hands.

39:5 [And it was from this time^ו
[during which] he appointed him^ו [over his house], and over [all that] [belonged to him], [the house was blessed] [by YHWH]—
the house of the Egyptian—on account of Joseph. [One could discern] the blessing of YHWH on all that was his, in the house and in the field.
6 [So he left] [everything he had] in the hands of Joseph. [He had no cares] [with Joseph there] [about anything],
except for the food that he himself ate. Meanwhile Joseph [end aliyah] [was fair of form] and fair to look at.

The attempt to seduce Joseph

7 [And it came to pass], after the things just described, [that cast] [the wife of his lord] her eyes on Joseph,
and she said, “Sleep with me.”
8 [But he demurred and he refused her and declined her offer]. He said to the wife of his master,
“Look, my master has no concerns—with me here—[with what is in the house]. All that he has he has entrusted to me.
9 There is no one greater in [this house] [than I am]. [He has not denied] to me anything, except you yourself, since you are his wife.
So how could I commit an evil so great—[such wickedness], and sin against God?
10 [And it happened], when she spoke to Joseph day after day, [that he would not] [respond to her], to lie beside her, to be with her.
11 [It was on just] such a day, when he came to the house to do his work, that there was no one of [the household staff] there in the house.
12 [And she grabbed him] [by his cloak] saying, “Lie with me.” [But he left] his cloak in her hand. He fled and ran outside.
13 But then, [when she realized] that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run outside,
14 [that she called] to the people—the household staff—and spoke to them, saying:”[Come and see!]
[He has] [brought to us] a man of the Hebrews, [to play games] with us. [This one] came to lie with me, [but I cried out] in a loud voice.
15 And then, [when he heard] that I raised my voice and cried out, he left his coat [beside me], and fled, running outside.”
16 She put the coat down [beside her], until his lord came back to his house.
17 She spoke to him, in words like these, by saying, “There came [up to me]
[that servant]—[the Hebrew man] whom you brought to us, he played games with me.”
18 [And it happened], when I raised my voice, [and cried out], he left [behind his clothes] [next to me], and ran outside.
19 [And when this was] heard by Joseph’s lord—the words [of his wife]—[words she expressed] to him by saying,
“Such things as these were done to me, by your servant,” [there flared up] his anger.

39:20 [He then took him]—Joseph's master [took him away] [and put him] in the house of confinement.
[This was the place] in which were confined by the king his prisoners. [And he remained there], inside that prison.

Joseph in jail

21 And YHWH [was with Joseph], extending to him kindness, [and made him find] favor in the eyes of the chief of the prison house.

22 [The prisoners were put] [by the chief] jailer [into the hand of Joseph], yes, all of the prisoners, the inmates [of the prison house].
Whatever [tasks there were] to be done [in that place], [it was he] who performed them.

23 [There never was a need] by the chief [of the prison house]

to see [anything at all] [that was in Joseph's hands], because YHWH [was with him]. [end aliyah] Whatever he did, YHWH made successful.

Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's officials

40:1 [It came to pass] after the events just reported: [there was an offense] by the steward of the king of Egypt, [and by the baker],
[against their lord], the king of Egypt.

2 It enraged Pharaoh against his two officials: against the chief steward and against the chief baker.

3 And so he placed them [under arrest] [in the house] of the chief of the guards,
in the house of confinement—[the very place] in which Joseph was imprisoned.

4 [He was appointed] by the captain [of the guardsmen]—[Joseph was] [assigned to the officials] to look after them.
[They were for some time] [kept under watch].

5 [And they dreamed] a dream—the two of them, [each of them] had a dream in a single night.

[For each one] there was a meaning for his dream—[the steward or cupbearer], [and the baker],
who served the king of Egypt, and who were imprisoned, in the house of confinement.

6 [When there came] [to visit them] Joseph one morning [and he] [saw them], he beheld [that they were distraught].

7 [So he inquired] [of these officials] of the Pharaoh [who were there with him], [kept under watch], in the house of his master, saying:
“[Why do you] have faces so downcast today?”

8 They replied to him, “A dream have we dreamed, but an interpreter we have [none for it]. And responding to them—[Joseph said this],
“[Are they not] from God, the meanings? [Tell the dreams, if you will], to me.”

40:9 [Thus recounted] [the chief steward] his dream to Joseph, saying to him, "[In the dream I had], I beheld a grape vine [in front of me].

10 [On the grape vine] [there were three winding] tendrils.

[As soon as it] budded [there came up] a blossom. [There came forth from its clusters] [ripe grapes].

11 [The cup of Pharaoh] [was in my hand]. I took [hold of the grapes] and squeezed them out into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup into the hand of Pharaoh.

12 Answering him, [Joseph said], "Here is the meaning: The three winding tendrils do three days represent.

13 [In the days to come]—[in just [three more days] [will be lifted up] by Pharaoh—your head, [he will put you back] at your post. [You will again place] [the cup of Pharaoh] in his hand [as was the custom] formerly, when you were his cupbearer.

14 [If only] [you will remember] [that I was with you], [when it happens] [that things go well] [with you], please do for me a favor: [mention me] to Pharaoh. [Thus will you get me out] of this prison house.

15 In truth, I was kidnapped [from the land] of the Hebrews.

[Since coming here], [I have done] nothing to make them put me [into the dungeon]."

16 When saw the chief baker [how much Joseph] made clear, he said to Joseph,

"And me—[here is my dream]: [In it I saw]—[again there were three]—baskets of white bread on my head.

17 [In the basket] [that was uppermost] [there were some] of the foods liked by Pharaoh, prepared by a baker. [But there were birds] [that I saw] [were eating them] [from the basket], from off my head."

18 Then answered Joseph by saying, "Here is its meaning: The three baskets do three days represent.

19 [In the days to come]—[in just [three more days] [will be lifted] by Pharaoh—your head, [from off of you]. He will hang you on a tree. [You will be eaten] [up by the birds]. Your flesh [will be picked off from you].

20 [And so it was], on day the third, [it was] the birthday of Pharaoh, and he made a banquet [for all of his servants].

[And he raised up] [the head of] [the chief cupbearer [*i.e.* he released him from prison],

[and also the head] of the chief baker, in the presence of his officials.

21 [And he restored] the chief steward to his position, who then placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

22 [But indeed], the chief baker he hanged, [just as] [had been predicted] [to them] by Joseph.

23 [But he was not kept in mind] [by the chief steward]—[end aliyah] [the man Joseph]. [He forgot all about him].

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (<i>or</i> : azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
(Renew our days)	(She weeps bitterly).	(a fire-offering to God)

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “*God*” or “*Adonai*”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)